

COLUBER CHIAMETLA SHAW, 1802 (REPTILLA: SERPENTES):
PROPOSED REJECTION AS A *NOMEN OBLITUM*.
Z.N.(S.) 1704

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Carl Gans has recently pointed out (1964 : 35) that *Coluber chiametla* Shaw, 1802 (p. 440) is a *nomen oblitum* that has never been allocated although recorded from Mexico, where the herpetofauna and its literature have been subjected to fairly careful scrutiny. As stated by Gans, Shaw based his name upon two plates and descriptions in Seba (1735 : pl. 61, fig. 1, pl. 36, fig. 4).

The explanation for fig. 1 of pl. 61 of Seba has been kindly translated from the original Latin by Dr. Donald P. Rogers of the Department of Botany, Univ. of Illinois, as follows: "Serpens, Americana, called Chiametla, located near New Galicia and the Cullacan region whence it was brought. The natives of the Chile region and Galicia call it in their dialect Cobra or Vilo de Chiametla; Cobra and also Vilo denote for them a serpent in Arnold Montanus p. 560; who in the same place adds that near the tract Zapuatan there occurs an immense number of serpents, myriads of which, as though rolled into a ball, with heads stretching out on all sides, with great hissing and jaws wide open, gape at their prey. The head of this serpent is thick and broad, is clothed with large pale blue scales shaded with darker blue. The skin of the supine body is covered with blue scales spotted with white but toward the tail uniformly dark blue. Toward both sides of the belly are distinguished blackish spots resembling eyes. It reaches at least two cubits in length, sustaining itself on caterpillars, ants and worms."

The explanation for fig. 4 of pl. 36 states (translated from the original Latin): "This also is a species of Viper, an inhabitant of the island of St. Eustachius, most elegantly colored, the scales bright blue, with scattered whitish scales. The belly, or its scales, is yellowish ruddy. The head is marked like the preceding [fig. 3], except that it is covered on all sides by large blue scales. The anus is indicated by the letter D."

St. Eustachius is one of the northernmost islands of the Leeward Group of the Lesser Antilles, just north of St. Kitts. The Seba specimen from there is undoubtedly *Alsophis rufiventris* (Duméril and Bibron, 1854).

The figure cited on plate 61 shows every scale with a central light area, larger on the more dorsal scales, smaller on the lateral scales. There are no marks on the head. The body is slender, the tail long, racerlike. The "eye-like" spots are merely black scales, each with a more sharply defined, smaller central light spot.

Shaw's name of *Coluber chiametla* is obviously based on plate 61, since this in turn is based upon a Chiametla snake. It therefore is reasonable to restrict the name to fig. 1 of pl. 61; since the specimen on which the drawing was based is not known to exist, I now designate that illustration the type of Shaw's *Coluber chiametla*. Allocation of that name now hinges solely upon allocation of the illustration.

Chiametla is a name no longer cited on modern maps of Mexico. Several hundred years ago, however, it was a virtual commonplace. The 1783 map (Pl. 5) reproduced herewith (Doll, 1783), no doubt very similar to maps used by Seba, clearly shows New Galicia, a territory including parts of modern Jalisco, Nayarit and Sinaloa, and a "Chiametlan" a short distance east of Mazatlán. The river near it—the modern Rio del Baluarte—is shown as "Chiametla Fluvi" on a map dated 1595 (Bry). The spelling is "Chametla" on an 1823 map (Carey and Lea) which uses the name for both a locality and the river. Obviously the locality was well-publicized in the 18th century when Seba wrote, and its fixation a short distance south of present-day Rosario is reasonably assured.

The only snake resembling the description of *Coluber chiametla* known from that area is *Drymobius margaritiferus fistulosus* Smith, 1942. There is no reasonable doubt that these two names are synonymous. The size, general pattern and body form agree excellently. Unfortunately Shaw's name antedates both the sub-specific and the specific name (*Herpetodryas margaritiferus* Schlegel, 1837). The subspecific form has not been cited sufficiently that substitution of another name for it would concern anyone save a few specialists; the specific name however has been very widely used for the common species to which it has been applied for over 100 years. On the contrary, *Coluber chiametla* has not, so far as I am aware, been used as a senior synonym since 1824, when Wagler erroneously identified specimens of *Liophis miliaris* Linnaeus as "*Natrix chiametla* Shaw" (Gans, 1964 : 35).

Accordingly *Coluber chiametla* Shaw qualifies as a *nomen oblitum*. In the interest of stability of nomenclature, Article 23b of the 1964 Code is invoked in the present request that the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature:

- (1) Declare the species-group name *chiametla*, as published in the combination *Coluber chiametla* Shaw, 1802, unavailable for purposes of the Law of Priority but not for the Law of Homonymy; and
- (2) Place the species-group name *chiametla* of (1) above on the Official Index of Invalid and Rejected Species-Group Names in Zoology as a *nomen oblitum*.

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